DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 121 728 SP 009 988

AUTHOR Frith, Greg
TITLE Broadening of Graduate Practicums (An overview of how Jacksonville State University increased the practical experiences available to employed Master's level students).
INSTITUTION Jacksonville State Univ., Ala.
PUB DATE [75]
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Graduate Study; Internship Programs; Masters Degrees; *Practicums; *Special Education Teachers; Teacher Interns; *Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

Educators agree that the interaction of teachers in training with exceptional children through the medium of practicums or internships is an essential component of every teacher education program. At the undergraduate level, where the student is usually pursuing a degree on a full time basis, ample opportunities exist for interaction with children, both in conjunction with classroom assignments and through student teaching. At the Master's level, where most students pursue a degree on a part time basis (and are employed as a teacher during the day), practical work is logistically more difficult to arrange. Student feedback at Jacksonville State University indicated that additional types of exposure would be meaningful. Thus, an agreement was reached with the nearby Calhoun County School System whereby special education teachers enrolled for an intership in special education were permitted to receive exposure to classroom situations other than their own. Implementation of the program necessitated (1) the approval and cooperation of the Superintendent of Education for the county, the Coordinator of Special Education, and various teachers; (2) pre-planning by program administrators and caution in the participant selection; (3) the encouragement of participants; and (4) follow-up asking teachers and administrators involved to exchange experiences formally and informally. This exchange program, in which some teachers were given total responsibility for a classroom and others were allowed to observe, was perceived as being quite meaningful by everyone involved. (A list of observations of participating teachers and recommendations for university supervisors are included.) (DMT)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED121728

BROADENING OF GRADUATE PRACTICUMS (An overview of how Jacksonville State University increased the practical experiences available to employed Master's level students)

The Master's program in special education at Jacksonville State University presently is limited to the exceptionality of mental retardation. Approximately 100 students from the surrounding Appalachian region of Northeast Alabama are pursuing a degree (or in rare instances, certification only). All students are required to take an introductory course of a survey nature, a course in psychology of the mentally retarded, a methods and materials course, and an internship, in addition to a minimum of two to four electives in special education. The majority of students in the program could be described as "retreads", because their undergraduate degrees are in areas other than special education.

Educators (Shane, Van Osdol, 1974; Ostanski, 1975) agree that the interaction of teachers in training with exceptional children through the medium of practicums or internships is an essential component of every teacher education program. Andrews (1975) recommends a planned series of experiences for teachers in training designed to increase their exposure to the various roles of a teacher. The need for training experiences which afford education students the opportunity to relate theory to practice is citied by Bernard (1972) and Silberman (1970).

At the undergraduate level, where the student is usually pursuing a degree on a full time basis, ample opportunities exist for interaction with children, both in conjunction with classroom assignments and through student teaching. At the Master's level, where most students pursue a degree on a part-time basis (and are employed

SP009 988

as a teacher during the day), practical work is logistically more difficult to arrange. Therefore in most graduate programs, practicum assignments are generally centered around the teacher's regular classroom. In this situation where the teacher feels comfortable due to prolonged exposure to the children and the facilities, she has positive conditions in which to exhibit and refine her skills. Other variables contributing to practicum work being offered in the classroom of the teacher's employment include minimum summer school practicum sites, and expediency. A sampling of various university catalogs indicates that graduate field experiences are generally conducted in this manner. The planning, execution, and evaluation of the teacher's performance is the responsibility of the desig ated university supervisor, working in conjunction with local school personnel (usually the building principal and the special education director).

Student feedback to this type of arrangement at Jacksonville State University, although favorable, indicated that additional types of exposure would be meaningful. In view of this recognized need, an agreement was reached with the nearby Calhoun County School System, whereby respective special education teachers who were enrolled in SPE 511, Internship in Special Education, were permitted to receive exposure to classroom situations other than their own. This exchange progra in which some teachers were given total responsibility for a classroom and othe s were allowed to observe was perceived as being quite meaningful by everyone involved. The purpose of this article is to share the logistics responsible for this success with other

university personnel who might desire to conduct similar activities, as well as to offer recommendations that might be of value.

Logistics of Program Implementation

1. Encouragement of Mr. Charles Boozer, Superintendent of Education, Calhoun County Board of Education. No attempt to implement the program was made without first receiving his permission and endorsement.
2. Cooperation of the respective principals and teachers. This was achieved by continuous effort to maintain open channels of communication with all concerned.
3. Involvement of the coordinator of special education. Her willingness to participate by assuming responsibility for a classroom (which initiated a chain reaction of teacher exchanges) assisted in providing the program with a positive beginning. Feedback indicated that her return to the classroom was a personally meaningful experience.
4. Support and enthusiasm of the respective teachers. Initial concern over behavioral problems generally proved to be unfounded. This was controlled largely due to pre-planning with regard to teacher placement. Intentions were to place teachers in charge of classrooms only when it was mutually believed that they were adequately prepared for such an assignment. Success was generally achieved in this respect, with possibly one minor exception.
5. Pre-planning. Teachers were cooperatively selected on the basis of their perceived strengths and weaknesses. Factors considered included classroom management, classroom arrangement, and the personalities of the teachers. Very little was left to chance.

Teachers discussed respective assignments with each other prior to the day of exchange and generally knew what to expect. Written, detailed lesson plans were also shared.

6. Follow-through. On the days that swapping occurred, attempts were made to visit as many classes as possible to provide support and encouragement as well as receive feedback from the teachers and principals.
7. Follow-up. Teachers that were involved were asked to share their observations with each other. This exchange of ideas appeared to be healthy. Written reports of their experiences were required in conjunction with the Internship. Content of these reports were also shared with the respective principals to insure continuity.

Observations of Participating Teachers

1. Behavior control is achieved more readily when it is one's routine responsibility.
2. Appreciation of one's regular classroom is enhanced by the opportunity to visit other classrooms.
3. Viewing new and varied materials and teaching methods is particularly valuable.
4. Exposure to various classrooms would be especially meaningful at the undergraduate level.
5. The value of such a program would be particularly beneficial to first year teachers.
6. Teachers were reluctant to share negative observations with each other. Increased empathy for the role of the coordinator or supervisor was expressed.
7. Participant evaluation indicated that the program should be

expanded in the future to include other school systems. Appreciation for the opportunity to participate in such a program was expressed by everyone.

Recommendations for University Supervisors

1. Establish and maintain open channels of communication with all local education agency personnel, including the superintendent, building principals, special education coordinator, and the teachers. The key word is "share". Be responsive to suggestions made by the local educators and incorporate them whenever possible. This necessity to be sensitive to the requests of local personnel is also stated by Reger (1974).
2. After details are specified, send them in writing to the superintendent and share copies with other personnel who are involved. This effort, although monotonous at times, should minimize explanations as the program is implemented.
3. Teacher placements should be made only after thoughtful deliberation. Be aware of each teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Visiting teachers should be given sole responsibility for classroom control only if they have demonstrated a readiness to assume this responsibility. Otherwise, only observation and perhaps teaching under supervision should be permitted. The old adage that "one bad apple will ruin the whole barrel" may be applicable to this program unless caution is exercised.
4. Preplanning activities, where teachers can discuss student behavior, lesson plans, and other pertinent matters, are important. The amount of apprehension usually declines considerably if the teacher knows what to expect before classroom exchanges are conducted.

5. Personally visit each teacher exchange effort in order to provide and receive direct communications. Give particular attention to "marginal" teachers and adjust your schedule accordingly.

6. Evaluation, both written and informal, is an essential aspect of the program. Visiting teachers not only learn from their new classroom experiences, but usually are able to make valuable recommendations to the regular teachers. Pertinent feedback should be shared in writing with local school administrators. Exceptions may occasionally occur when teachers ask that certain observations remain confidential.

References

Andrews, L.O. Student teaching as a springboard for in-service education. Theory into Practice, 1975, 14, 11-19.

Bernard, H.W. Psychology and Learning of Teaching. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1972.

Eye, G.G. Supervisors, students, and cooperating teachers. Journal of Educational Research, 1974, 68, 164-9.

Ostanski, J.O. New dimensions and considerations in training special education teachers. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 1975, 10, 117-19.

Reger, R. How can we influence teacher training programs? Journal of Special Education, 1974, 2, 7-13.

Shane, D.S. and Van Osdol, W.R. Practicum: as a part of special education training programs. Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded, 1974, 9, 74-77.

Silberman, C.E. Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of American Education. New York: Random House, 1970.